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A MONTHLY LETTER ABOUT EVANGELISM

LETTRE MENSUELLE SUR L'ÉVANGÉLISATION

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OF RELIGION

Number 6
June 1959

Dr. Hugh MacMillan, a Canadian missionary in Formosa, is the author of the following letter about

EVANGELISM AMONG THE MOUNTAIN TRIBESMEN OF FORMOSA

Before Formosa, "The Island Beautiful of East Asia" became known in the 16th century by this Portugese name, it was the home of the progenitors of the present day tribes; of the Tyals, the Bununs, the Amis, the Paiwans and other smaller groups, now 160,000 in all. Invasion of the rich, coastal plains by Chinese from the Mainland of China drove these original inhabitants away from their homes into the high mountains. These stretch from north to south in the island in ranges whose 50 or more peaks rise to heights of 10,000 to 13,000 feet. Here, for four centuries or more the Tribesmen have had to wrest a precarious living from the sparse soil at high altitudes and amongst rocks and trees. Here, in revenge they kept up their tribal spirit by resort to "head-hunting" against the aggressors on the plains below. Here they developed customs that helped to preserve the integrity of their tribal Braves in spite of divisive influences caused by the allurments of their conquerors. Here they stood out against the worship of the gods of the Chinese. But meanwhile their own tribal customs degenerated as their head-hunting forays faced constituted authority. Some tribes living in the foothills became more susceptible to Chinese influences. In the 17th century during four decades of Dutch occupation, Reformed Church missionaries made the re-conquest of the island by Chinese under Koxinga in 1662. Relics of the missionary life in the Dutch period may be found in such things as household utensils coated with centuries of rust but venerated by heathen worshippers. The writer was once shown knives and forks kept in a little shrine for obeisance by passers' by.

In the 19th century when English Presbyterian missionaries crossed over from Amoy on the Chinese mainland and Canadian Presbyterians joined them from Canada they received their most open reception from these foothills' people, the "Pepohoan" or Aborigines of the Plains. They were received as the descendants of 17th century missionaries. Through the Chinese language and customs which the Pepohoan had adopted, the missionaries made speedy and understanding contact. Numerous churches were established, among them not a few of which are part of the Presbyterian Church of Formosa today. But, due to tribal conditions, economic instability and an inadequate number of

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missionaries to give necessary supervision, these have not progressed as the early and warm reception gave hope, nor have they had the missionary influence on the higher mountain tribes once anticipated.

In the half century, 1895 to 1945, when Formosa was occupied by Japan, the Government feared the high mountain "head-hunting" people and especially the effects of missionary activity among them. Some tribal areas were fenced around with electrified wire, and the work of evangelism was everywhere strictly prohibited. But prohibition served only to whet the curiosity of the tribes people. Why the prohibition? Had the users of the strange knives and forks come alive again? Reports of foreign strangers having been seen by mountain tribesmen on occasionally permitted visits to the plains became subjects for discussion around aboriginal camp fires. The sons of honoured head-hunters behind the live wires dreamed dreams of life beyond the distant horizon. They also had visions of the strange faces seen in the plains below.

During this time a Japanese official on duty in the tribal area was murdered. His son took the blow of his father's death as a challenge to go to preach the Gospel to the "head-hunters". He was not permitted to enter the restricted area nor did he dare to make public his intention, but his resolution found a way through his becoming a dispenser of medical supplies. He got appointed to work in a little clinic on the tribal boundary line. From there the Gospel was carried by tribesmen into the mountain fastnesses along with their aspirin, quinine and worm medicine. There were stories of these medicines having miraculous powers due to his influence.

In spite of strict prohibitions and electrically charged wire fences, more and more contacts took place between mountain tribesmen and people of the plains. About this time a young Chinese cloth salesman "went native" to marry a young tribal woman. Later, she and her husband came down to live in the plains. Here she learned to speak the Amoy Chinese language. Here she met native Christians, also English and Canadian missionaries. A Canadian missionary who met her at that time was amazed that an aboriginal woman, "tatooed from ear to mouth and mouth to ear" according to the marriage custom of her tribe could be so friendly and so free in conversation with a foreign stranger. She also learned the language of the Japanese policemen and often had to take part in reconciling differences between members of her own warrior tribe and the rulers. Once when Japanese militarists would have bombed and burned her people's villages as punishment for some mis-conduct, she was able to use her influence to prevent the awful day. To improve her knowledge of the Christianity she had come to accept, Chi-wang, for that was her name, attended a mission school for a short time and then went back to her own people with strong purpose to lead them to Christ. She had with her the Bible in Romanized Amoy Chinese she had come to love and the Japanese hymn book she could use among her song-loving mountain friends.

Then World War II broke out and the Japanese military might soon had the whole of South Asia in its grasp. Many "head-hunter" tribesmen in Formosa were drafted into the forces and trained to use their long developed tactics of guerilla warfare against the enemy in mountainous areas of the Philippines, Indonesia and the islands of the sea. They were told never to be taken prisoner because horrible torture at the hands of the ruthless, foreign enemy would be swift and sure. But fireside tales heard as boys in their mountain villages about strange foreigners of long ago made them wonder. In battle and tropical jungle life most perished but a few were taken prisoner. News filtered back that some of these were still alive and this spread far and wide in the home villages.

Meanwhile in the villages Chi-wang's Bible and Hymn Book multiplied, and even more so the readers. But all books had to be kept hidden from the ever watchful eyes of Japanese detectives and police. All meetings had to be held in secret, usually taking place in secluded mountain retreats and in the dead of night. Several of the faithful had to suffer floggings, terrible torture and imprisonment. But the more these suffered the more widely did the Christian movement spread.

The war ended, the Tribes people's beloved Chi-wang passed away. Her grave is outside of the city of Hwalien within sound of the Pacific surf. And on high ground overlooking the Ocean a Chi-wang Memorical Church is now being planned. Groups of her friends are seeking contributions to make the memorial possible. Chi-wang Memorial Church will be but one of 350 churches that have come into being, during and since the war. These congregations are under the care for the most part of untrained laymen, but within the past three years twenty of their young men with special training have been ordained as pastors. A few missionaries of the Presbyterian Churches of England, Canada and the U.S. give part-time leadership to this growing but needy church.

Today in these hundreds of tribal villages the little congregations live in the midst of heathenism and hostility. Through past years "a great door and effectual" has been opened but "adversaries" are many. The use of Chi-wang's Bibles in the Amoy Chinese and Japanese languages that many learned to love has been forbidden by the authorities. So is the use of the Japanese Hymn Book from which the tribes people loved to sing. Progress in acquiring Mandarin Chinese is being made but this takes time and special effort. In matters of faith there is the confusion caused by the evangelistic efforts of Roman Priests and Pentecostal groups. Tribal Christians have begun to make adjustment of their lives to the new age but old time adversaries are still in deeply entrenched positions - old customs steeped in superstition; ignorance and immorality. Education suited to their needs of better livelihood and the raising up of qualified leadership should be the burden of prayers for this people.

In August this year an Ecumenical Work Camp is expected to be held in the aboriginal area where representative young people from the plains, together with a few from neighbouring countries will work and worship with mountain youth. In work, it is expected that these, with pick and shovel will help to level the ground for a Christian Centre to promote the training of leaders for these worthy "Highlanders". This is to be known as the Mount Morrison Institute. It is the name of Formosa's highest mountain; also of the pioneer Protestant missionary to China.